

What Are Loose Parts?



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- Loose Parts are objects and materials that can be used for open-ended play.
- They can be natural materials or man-made objects. They can be large or small.
- Loose Parts can be carried, moved, sorted, stacked, taken apart, joined together and used to create new things.
- They offer endless potential for imagination and creativity.



Loose Parts Play Theory

Loose Parts Play Theory was developed in the 1970s by Simon Nicholson, an architect. He suggested that children should be provided with materials and objects that can be carried, transported, combined, stacked, dismantled and reused, and given time to explore, experiment and create with them without adult direction or instruction. This provides children with opportunities to develop their imagination, creativity and problem-solving skills.

Examples of Natural Loose Parts



Shells

Coconut shells

Conkers

Bark

Sticks

Tree stumps

Pine cones

Moss

Stones

Flowers

Acorns

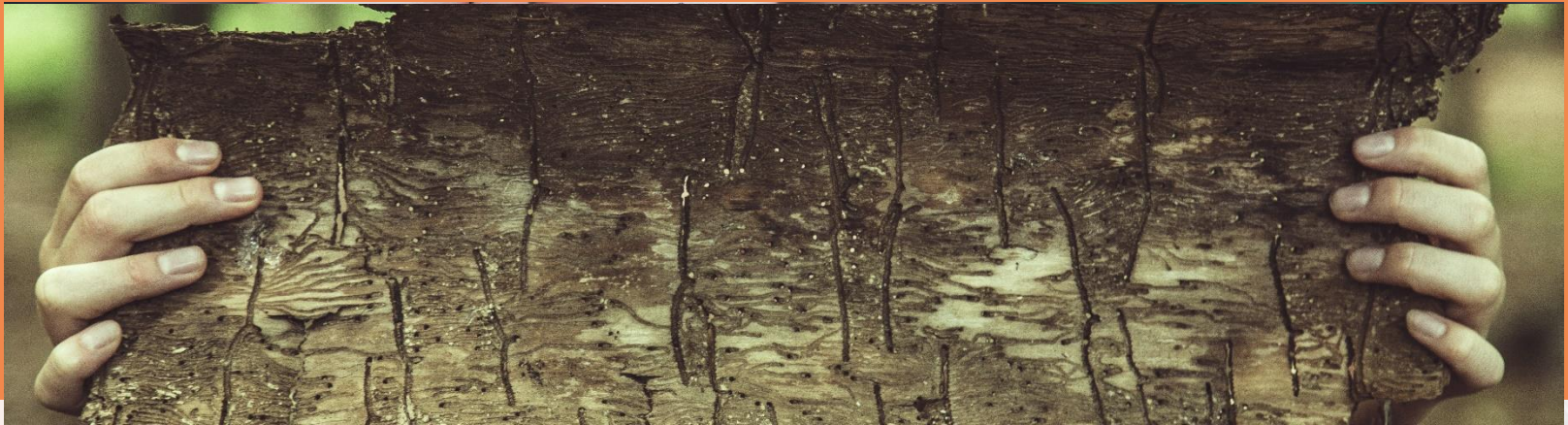
Logs

Driftwood

Leaves

Seeds

Examples of Man-Made Loose Parts



Pans

Corks

Beads

String

Keys

Wooden Pegs

Cardboard boxes

Spoons

Tyres

Wool

Bottle tops

Crates

Baskets

Washers

Guttering

Ribbon

Pipes

Curtain Rings

Sieves

Buckets

Pallets

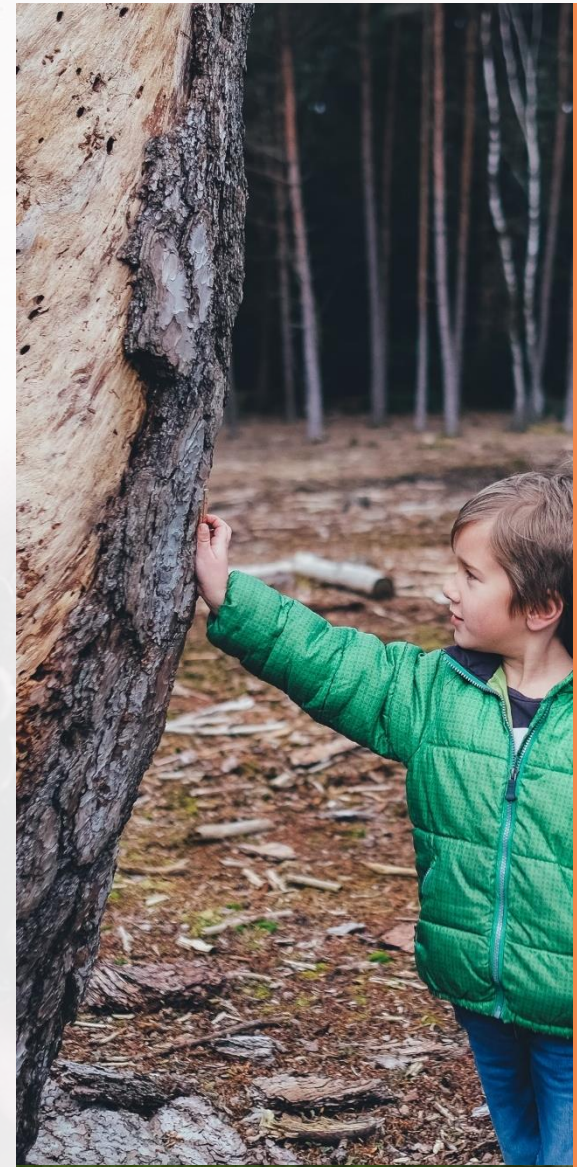


What Are the Benefits of Loose Parts?

- Most toys have a fixed purpose. For example, a toy carrot will generally be used by children as a carrot in their play.
- When children are given Loose Parts, they experience endless possibilities for creative and imaginative play. Loose Parts can become anything that the child imagines. They are open-ended resources with no fixed outcome or instructions to follow.
- Children can work collaboratively with their peers to solve problems through discussions and negotiations.
- Loose Parts can often be collected or sourced for free or at little cost, so it can be relatively easy to build up a good collection.

How to Use Loose Parts

- Provide a variety of Loose Parts both indoors and outdoors and allow children to use them imaginatively, following their own interests.
- Store Loose Parts in clearly labelled containers that can be independently accessed and tidied by children.
- Replenish regularly to ensure sufficient resources are available.
- Ask parents, carers and local businesses to collect and donate suitable objects and materials for Loose Parts Play. Loose Parts can be used from nursery up to Primary 7 due to their open-ended nature.



Safety



- Check all Loose Parts for any damages, weaknesses or sharp edges before allowing children to play with them.
- Regularly assess Loose Parts and remove any broken or unsafe objects.
- If you have a child who is likely to put an object into their mouth, you will need to ensure that small Loose Parts are only used under direct adult supervision.



Loose Parts and Curriculum for Excellence

Many Experiences and Outcomes can be achieved using Loose Parts Play.

Within real and imaginary situations, I share experiences and feelings, ideas and information in a way that communicates my message. LIT 0-09a

I can share their thoughts with others to help further develop ideas and solve problems. TCH 0-04c

I can match objects, and sort using my own and others' criteria, sharing my ideas with others. MNU 0-20b

Through creative play, I explore different materials and can share my reasoning for selecting materials for different purposes. SCN 0-15a

I explore ways to design and construct models. TCH 0-09a

I explore and discover different ways of representing ideas in imaginative ways. TCH 0-11a

Loose Parts and How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare

How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare highlights the importance of Loose Parts Play in the Level 5 Illustration for Q.I. 3.3.

‘We ensure that children access open-ended play materials to extend their creativity and thinking.’



Further Information

- Nicholson, S. (1971) "How Not To Cheat Children: The Theory of Loose Parts", Landscape Architecture, v62, p30-35.
- <https://www.playscotland.org/parents-families/loose-parts-play/>

